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Hello, I would like to thank this committee for allowing me to speak today. I am here to tell you all a little about our family's life and how good mental health care affects our quality of life. My husband and I have a son and a daughter and our life was good until my son turned 17 years old. Everything changed. After months of bizarre behavior and terrifying events, our son was diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 18. He is now 29 years old. Up until two years ago, he had been living with my husband, my daughter and me. For those of you who have had teenagers, you know to expect occasional distress calls in the middle of the night. For the past 10 years we got them day and night. When I would get a call from my husband, I didn't even say hello, just "what happened?" And my husband answered the same way. The calls would go like this:

He's been arrested.

He's been in a fight with a stranger.

He punched holes in the walls of our home.

He lost his phone and wallet.

He got in an accident in New York City.

He was fired from his job.

... and on and on.

Our life was a nightmare. We couldn't leave him alone in our home. We couldn't sleep, and had pain in the pit in our stomachs all of the time. He was off meds, on meds, in and out of many of the psych hospitals in Connecticut, too many to count. We had continual problems getting consistent, intensive psychiatric services for him. He was unhappy having this illness and not being independent like kids his own age.

We searched for supportive care housing for years with no luck. Two years ago, we began having conversations with one of the directors at Continuum of Care, a DMHAS-funded facility. She was trying to help us get our son placed in supervised housing. But there was always someone else that was in more need of services. Then came a blessing. Our son was accepted into the supervised housing program at Continuum of Care. It was life changing for all of us. Our son feels more independent and gets along great with the staff. There are young people supervising the home and they have a wonderful relationship with our son. He sits and talks with the staff members every day and feels comfortable sharing things with them. He has a visiting nurse that he likes and respects, and he is compliant with his meds, something that didn't often happen at home. The staff who work at Continuum are the most wonderful community health workers we have ever encountered. We stay in touch with them and stay involved in our son's well-being. Our son was hospitalized at Yale New Haven Psychiatric hospital last year. Several staff members from Continuum visited him at the hospital and we were pleasantly surprised when 3 staff members attended family meetings with us. It was a great feeling for us to know that there are people out there helping my son and not to have the burden of caring for someone with a mental illness fall solely on us.

Yale New Haven Hospital clinicians were also able to provide a referral for outpatient services at the Connecticut Mental Health Center, which is also a DMHAS-funded facility, and he now gets excellent services and regularly sees a psychiatrist there. Continuum of Care is part of the Community Care Teams that are in danger of losing funding as well. In addition, I have applied for an appointment to the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council which I understand is being considered for funding cuts.

Thank you for listening, and I hope you have a better understanding of how good mental health care dramatically affects our quality of life, both for the patient and the caregivers. I urge you to support strong funding for care for the mentally ill in our state. It really matters.